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Testimony to the D.O.E, St. Louis, MO, Hearing, Jan. 20, 2000

1 How many of you, when you're listening to the radio while you're getting dressed in the morning or driving to work have heard a warning to avoid some stretch of highway because there's been an accident resulting in an overturned tractor-trailer? Or how many of you saw yesterday's headline in the Metro section of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, "Derailed train knocks house off foundation?" Major train and especially trucking accidents are fairly common, wouldn't you say? Now the Post-Dispatch stated on Jan. 17th that if the D.O.E. decides to send all this nuclear waste to Yucca Mountain, "at least 40 percent of the highway shipments and 25 percent of the rail shipments would come through the St. Louis area." And you could see on their map how most of the major road and rail arteries feed right through our city. This means a mixture of approximately 6000 train and truck shipments would pass through St. Louis over the 30-year shipping campaign – or one, on average, every other day. Right there is the potential for an awful lot of accidents.

2 Accidents are bad enough, spilling nuclear poisons into our water and atmosphere, but how about sabotage or terrorist attacks? Terrorists would love to steal our plutonium to manufacture their own bombs. Or they might just want to demand millions of dollars or other terrorists' release from jail in exchange for not blowing up a high-level radioactive waste transport. With such frequency of shipment, it couldn't be too hard for terrorists to figure out when and where these materials are en route. If a bomb landed on one of these vehicles, or a suicide bomber decided to ram one, we're talking about life-threatening pollution, not just to the surrounding area, but to the entire city. In the D.O.E.'s Draft Summary Environmental Impact Statement, in a chart of Estimated National Transportation Impacts for 24 years of operations (p.S-53), latent cancer fatalities from maximum reasonably foreseeable accidents are 5 for mostly truck scenarios and 31 for mostly rail scenarios. These estimates could not possibly have included potential terrorist attacks. Apparently there is some concern about such attacks, as the Nuclear Regulatory Commission will require two armed escorts for every shipment of irradiated fuel rods. Such guards might have been able to save the stagecoaches of days past, but I have little hope that they could overpower modern terrorists.

3 While I am deeply disturbed about the danger to citizens from these transportation risks, the situation at the Yucca Mountain site itself could be described as a terrorist's dream. If the plan is approved, shipments could begin as early as 2004, but they'll have no safe place to go. Supposedly nuclear wastes can begin to be loaded into the new facility when it is 10% completed. But until that time they'll be huddled together like a flock of sitting ducks on a parking lot, a perfect target for even an air attack.

While our Department of Energy may not fully acknowledge the peril in transporting high-level nuclear wastes, we don't have to look far to find others around the world who do. Last Saturday's New York Times (1/15/00) reported the following: "Bowing to renewed concerns about terrorist attacks, Panama authorities said today that they were beefing up security to protect a British ship carrying radioactive cargo through the Panama Canal this weekend. 'The vessel is a visible target for any group that wants to make a statement,' Jorge Quijano, director of maritime operations for the Panama Canal Authority, said in an interview today. Environmental groups fear that the ship...carrying high-level waste to Japan from France, is vulnerable to terrorists who could board and dislodge or rupture the casks with the waste, threatening a potentially catastrophic release of radioactivity." Paul Leventhal, a representative from the Nuclear Control Institute in Washington, commented, "The consequence of a release of radioactive waste would be long lived. (It)...would be very hard to clean up, and it could render the canal inoperable and the surrounding areas uninhabitable."

3 cont'd. The very thought of submitting countless numbers of our citizens to the possible disasters herein described is incomprehensible.

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